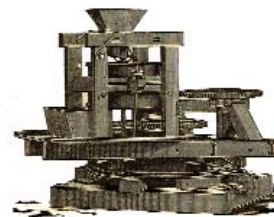


GRIST FOR THE MILL



The desire I have to stay inside, cook potato soup, and stoke the woodstove could have something to do with the three-week-old girl that just moved in with my wife, Sarah, and me. If Sarah was struck by the urge to nest as her pregnancy peaked, then we were both infected when the baby arrived.

Friends and family sanctioned this reclusiveness by decorating our porch with still-warm crocks of homemade soup and still-moist loaves of bread, a generous reminder that—as much as we like to cook—our time should be spent getting to know the baby. It helps that a cold November and daylight savings time mean there's not much gardening left to do. Staying inside conserves energy. A warm, well-fed mother means a warm, well-fed daughter.

But new parents are not alone in turning their attention inward.

Farmers and gardeners use the winter break to recover and plan for next year, repair and tune equipment, prune orchards, clean up the rougher fields, and order seeds. For Ken Ertlinger, one of the nation's leading seed breeders, winter is spent drying and storing and cataloging the dozens of varieties of seed he saves each year from his plots in Flanders. His store room of thousands of vegetable varieties—from Asian long beans to sunflowers to fennel—offers a hedge against a homogenous global food culture (p. 46).

When the grapevines go dormant, winemakers recede to their cellars, where what once covered acres is refined down to the space of barrels. This is even the case at Roanoke Vineyard in Riverhead, the East End's westernmost producer, whose warmer growing conditions mean an exclusive focus on red wines (p. 36). And, at the Long Island Meadery, medieval buff Paul Holm transforms the summertime sugar-gathering efforts of bees (great nesters, by the way) into alcohol, hoping to revive both an ancient drink and a respect for the animals who helped produce it (p. 26).

Farm stands remain open only by offering produce protected within greenhouses (p. 33); root crops that nestle in the fields; pickled cauliflower, corn relish and other preserves (p. 8); or apples and pears that stay crisp in cool barns waiting for the cider mill and pie bakers (p. 52).

When Springs writer Evan Harris embarked on several years of learning how to cook—"No more not cooking," she called her series of culinary mini-epics—she hoped to not only resolve a personal concern that her husband was the only adult in the house that could cook for their children, but to use cooking as a bridge to her friends and family (p. 40). Her newfound skills yielded nourishment—literally, but also emotionally.

For Linda Serbu and Alfred Vrang, a cooking-couple from Brooklyn, the nesting urge culminated in producing a harvest dinner at Garden of Eve organic farm in Aquebogue, guided entirely by what was ripening in the fields (see cover and p. 66). Like some culinary vortex, the locavore movement (named the word of the year by the *Oxford English Dictionary*) celebrates those pleasures right under our noses, and positions food as a tool for political, ecological or personal change.

So, like a new child, the ostensibly tiny, inner workings of a seed, a meal, and a bottle of wine end up having massive implications.

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